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ABSTRACT

This brief discusses outcomes of a study that investigated the employment and job search practices used with individuals with mental retardation to those used with individuals with mental illness, sensory impairments, and physical impairments. Survey participants included 568 employment staff and 303 individuals with disabilities from community rehabilitation providers, independent living centers, and state vocational rehabilitation agencies. Findings indicate: (1) individuals with mental retardation were less actively involved in their job search than individuals with other disabilities; (2) staff used more individualized job search strategies such as job restructuring, job matching, and job accommodations for individuals with mental retardation; (3) more traditional job search strategies such as offering subminimum wage and having the employee on the agency payroll instead of the employer's were used more frequently with individuals with mental retardation than other disabilities; (4) personal and professional networks to develop job leads were used less frequently with individuals with mental retardation; (5) individuals with mental retardation obtained jobs predominately in food service, manufacturing, maintenance, and retail; (6) the mean income for individuals with mental retardation was $4.87 an hour; and (7) individuals with mental retardation indicated higher levels of job satisfaction than those with other disabilities. (CR)

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Research Practice

By
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Introduction

This study was conducted to gain a better understanding of the relationship between job search practices and employment outcomes such as hours worked, wages, relationships at work and supports from supervisors. The study gathered information on job search practices used with individuals with mental retardation, mental illness, sensory impairments and physical impairments. This brief will focus on the practices used with individuals with mental retardation and how their outcomes differ from individuals with other disabilities.

Methodology

Survey participants included employment staff and individuals with disabilities (consumers) from community rehabilitation providers, Independent Living Centers and state vocational rehabilitation agencies. A multi-level design was implemented to obtain the perspective of both staff and consumers. Staff were nominated by their director and then received a survey. This survey asked for demographic information and a status report on the last consumer they assisted in obtaining employment who had remained on the job for at least sixty days. Surveys were also mailed to consumers directly, requesting that it be completed individually or with the assistance of someone other than the rehabilitation staff person.

A total of 568 staff people and 303 consumers responded to the survey. Two hundred and nineteen staff responses described the job search process for individuals with mental retardation. One hundred and sixteen individuals with mental retardation completed consumer surveys.

Findings

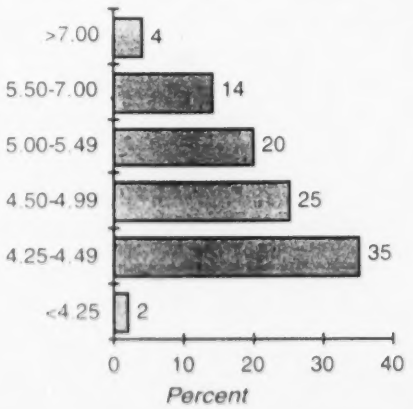
The job search process for individuals with mental retardation was different than the process for individuals with other disabilities.

- Both staff and consumer surveys indicated that individuals with mental retardation were less actively involved in their job search than individuals with other disabilities.
- Staff used more individualized job search strategies such as job restructuring, job matching and job accommodation for individuals with mental retardation.
- More traditional job search strategies such as offering subminimum wage and having the employee on the agency payroll instead of the employer's were used more frequently with individuals with mental retardation than other disabilities. In general, when these practices were used they were rated as less effective job search strategies.
- Personal and professional networks to develop job leads were used less frequently with individuals with mental retardation than with individuals with other disabilities.
- Eighty-eight percent of individuals with mental retardation had a job coach with them when learning the job. This was a significantly higher percentage than other disability categories.

Employment outcomes for individuals with mental retardation were generally in entry level, service occupations.

- Individuals obtained jobs predominately in food service, manufacturing, maintenance and retail.
- The mean income for individuals with mental retardation was $4.87 an hour.

Hourly Wages for Individuals with Mental Retardation



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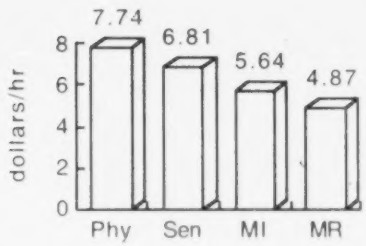
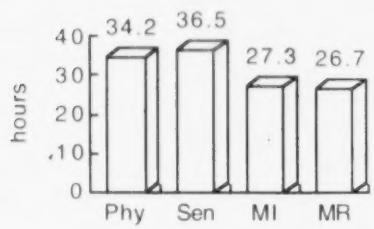
- Eighty-two percent of individuals with mental retardation earned less than $5.50 an hour.
- The median hours worked by individuals with mental retardation was 25 hours per week.
- Thirty-nine percent of individuals worked 20 hours or less and only 25% worked full time.

Employment outcomes reported by staff were significantly different for individuals with mental retardation (MR) in comparison to individuals with physical disabilities (Phy), sensory impairments (Sen) and mental illness (MI).

Mean Hourly Wage by Primary Disability



Mean Hours Worked by Primary Disability



Individuals with mental retardation indicated they were very satisfied on the job and comfortable in their interaction with others.

- Individuals with mental retardation indicated high levels of job satisfaction and had significantly higher average satisfaction than individuals in any other disability category.
- Ninety-nine percent of the individuals with mental retardation said they felt they could do what was expected of them on the job.
- The vast majority (90%) of individuals with mental retardation felt comfortable asking their supervisor for help when necessary.
- Comfort in dealing with supervisors was significantly higher for individuals with mental retardation than individuals with sensory impairments.
- Ninety-six percent of individuals with mental retardation reported they felt comfortable asking co-workers for assistance, remaining consistent with individuals from other disability groups.

Conclusion

There are many positive findings in this study, notably, that individuals with mental retardation were satisfied with their jobs and comfortable in interacting with supervisors and co-workers. However, the employment outcomes of hours, wages, and types of jobs indicate that individuals with mental retardation continue to be employed in entry level service industry jobs with low hourly wages and a lower number of hours worked per week. These outcomes are significantly lower than individuals in other disability groups.

A different emphasis in job search practices was used with individuals from other disability categories, and this may have contributed to the differences in outcomes. A networking approach (contacting previous employers, family and friends; identifying an advocate in the target agency; and using the staff person's personal and professional network) was used less frequently with individuals with mental retardation than other disabilities. Regardless of the nature of the individual's disability, when the networking approach was used it resulted in higher wages and hours. To increase the use of this approach with individuals with mental retardation, employment staff need to encourage more active involvement and collaboration in the job search process. To promote this staff can:

- Use person-centered planning approaches that encourage participation of the individual's social or community network.
- Maintain relationships with previous employers, and use these contacts as an introduction to other employers.
- Teach consumers the skills to create, use and maintain their networks.
- Involve the consumer's family members in the job search, since their relationships could be a source of job leads.

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